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POWESR Special Focus on Gender and Gaming Guest Editorial

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Many of the readers of the Psychology of Women and Equalities Section Review will be unfamiliar with the world of digital gaming and why this area of research might need feminist voices. As with many other digital spaces, participation of female-identifying gamers in video gaming culture is a contentious issue. Calls for more diverse representation in video game content and amongst video game development teams has been met with dismissal at best (Richard, 2016) and harassment at worst (Fox & Tang, 2017) from within gaming communities. The stereotype of the white, male, teenaged gamer still pervades (Paaßen et al., 2017) and this stereotype describes the assumed audience of many mainstream gaming products.

Arguments for why it is important to address gender and gaming in social science research have tended to focus on the link between participation and STEM careers (Jenkins & Cassell, 2008), and on ensuring that women are not disadvantaged in certain types of productive employment if they are discouraged from engagement in digital games. However, this argument ignores the wider societal consequences of silencing marginalised players; players who are not 'permitted' to claim 'gamer' or 'geek' identities (Paaßen et al., 2017) and may therefore fail to benefit from the positive consequences of gaming such as increased opportunities for friendship and community (Trepte et al., 2012) and enhanced psychological wellbeing (Jones et al., 2014). Video games offer exciting ways to experience challenge and opportunities to engage in identity experimentation, but remain, in many contexts, a boys' playground (Burrill, 2008).

Much of the existing literature on the gaming experiences of people who are not male and white has been from the perspective of research in media and communication studies. However, psychology, and especially critical feminist psychology, has much to add to the

growing research on this topic. It is a pleasure for us to be part of psychology's contribution to the area in the shape of this special focus issue on gender and gaming.

The issue starts by taking a social identity approach to gender and gaming, with Linda Kaye and Charlotte Pennington exploring how issues of social identity can explain some of the issues that women, for example, face when attempting to engage in gaming culture whilst still being seen as 'outgroup' members. The following paper by April Dye and Kelly Williams suggests that an ingroup/outgroup distinction may not be straightforward in gaming, as they explore internalised misogyny and poor treatment of women gamers from other gamers identifying themselves as women in online gaming communities. The next paper by Cole and Grogan adds to the literature on representation of women in digital games, presenting findings from an online qualitative survey which asked self-identified 'women gamers' to talk about their experiences of playing games featuring hypersexualised female characters and the potential impact on their games decisions and experiences. Celine Frohn's paper on gender and gaming communities explores the complexity of researching 'community' in digital games and the problems with treating the 'gaming community' as heterogeneous. Ford and Cole then present the findings of an interview study which examines how women gamers choose to represent themselves in video games and how this might not be the 'flight of fantasy' that it is for male players. Finally Drackett and Kenny consider affect in gaming communities on social media, focusing on a particular event on Twitter which highlights the issues which female developers, for example, face when expressing their emotions at being a member of a marginalised group in a public setting.

The papers here are focused on 'women gamers' and demonstrate how psychology, and feminist approaches in particular, can contribute to research on gender and gaming. This

research shows that issues of representation, identity, and community in video games need further examination. We hope that the work presented here inspires members who may be interested in gaming to make their own contributions to this exciting research area, and in particular will encourage others to investigate the experiences of the range of marginalised groups not represented here whose participation in digital gaming also needs highlighting and exploring.

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